

Forgotten heros
By Bill O'Brien

The forgotten ones

Last year I was honored to introduce in this column the long awaited FAA recognition of technicians in the form of the Aviation Maintenance Technician Awards Program, and our Master Mechanics Award. Both programs are experiencing an unparalleled acceptance from industry and continue to grow.

But in our haste to recognize the obvious, it seems to me that we bypassed a group of deserving individuals who make a positive impact on the maintenance career of many technicians. Some of these individuals we loved, some we hated, and some we respected, but like death and taxes, we never could ignore them. When we part company with these individuals and go our separate ways, we often tend to forget who give us the gifts of knowledge that turn us into technicians.

Who are these "forgotten ones?" They are the instructors in FAA certificated Part 147 schools. The men and women who teach us the ancient art of tying a modified seine knot, reading the new sign language of electrical schematics and learning the mathematical complexity of bend allowance and weight and balance.

Teaching, I have found out from personal experience, is a very difficult profession. A wise man once said: "To teach is to learn twice." Not only must one have a great deal of knowledge stored but also a great deal of patience is needed to transfer that knowledge to minds that are initially unwilling or unable to accept that transfer.

Going back to my own class of '68 I seem to recall that the composition of that class was approximately one quarter fresh out of high school. The rest of us were Vietnam veterans, cocky, airplane smart, noticeably nervous types who jumped every time a welding torch popped.

When mixed together we became a class from hell. No amount of money would entice me to go back to 1968 and teach that class.

So what does it take to become an instructor and face a class from hell? I won't pretend to know the answer, but I'm sure it is not the salary — especially when in a couple of years the average student will make more money than the instructor!

So why become an instructor? Obviously the desire to teach is a prime ingredient. What drives that desire could be many reasons.

Of the instructors I talked with over the last ten years, two of the more common reasons given to explain the desire to teach were: the need to give back to the profession that you love, and just seeing the way a student eyes light up when he or she understands a complex technical procedure. Many other reasons I heard are quite personal in nature.

Now to the real reason for this article. I am considering developing a staff study for a new program that would give recognition to forgotten ones, the Part 147 instructors. The program would be jointly developed by the FAA and industry, and be run by industry. It would be similar to the existing program for Flight Instructor and Mechanic of the year program that has run every year since 1971. I would like anyone who has any additional ideas on this subject to fax me at (202) 267-5115 or write to me at:

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I caution you that I'm only requesting information so I can write a staff study to "justify the implementation" of this new recognition program. I am NOT announcing a new program at this time. Right now, the program is just a vague idea bubbling around in the murky recesses of my mind. So I need your input to give it form on paper.

When you write to me, please explain in detail how you think the recognition program should look and how it should be run. Also, I would appreciate if you keep the KISS principle in mind when sending in your suggestions, and if at all possible try to design the program to run on air instead of money.